

Time After Time by TheAddict4Dramatics

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Summary: It was becoming increasingly ridiculous that whatever the situation, whatever the emotion, it always seemed to lead them here – to him pressing her against the nearest flat surface and kissing her like his life depended on it, (he was beginning to think that it did), and then pretending it never happened and starting all over again. Post 2x09 Joyce/Hopper angsty fluff.

1. Chapter 1: Anger

Disclaimer: Nothing belongs to me except the mistakes as this is un-beta'd.

Author's note: Please be warned quite a bit of swearing is about to follow and this is definitely angst not fluff but fluff will follow at some point I promise.

Time After Time

It was becoming increasingly ridiculous that whatever the situation, whatever the emotion, it always seemed to lead them here – to him pressing her against the nearest flat surface and kissing her like his life depended on it, (he was beginning to think that it did), and then pretending it never happened and starting all over again. Post 2x09 Joyce/Hopper angsty fluff.

Chapter One: Anger

Hopper wasn't entirely sure how they had ended up here; screaming at each other and saying utterly vile things he knew for sure neither of them meant. Thank god the boys and Jane were all occupied over at the Wheeler's and not there to witness it because he doubted either of them could have stopped even if they kids had been present.

She'd been off when he'd stopped by the store at lunch to check on the arrangements for tonight. She'd been distance, cold, *abrupt*. But it had still only been a few short months since Bob had died and he knew almost better than anyone that grief can make you all of those things and much more months and years after the occurrence. So he'd shrugged it off and dropped in on her after he'd left Jane at the Wheeler's to make sure there wasn't anything else he could do to help her.

Turns out that had been one hell of a mistake. Joyce had clearly been having one of those days where she needed somebody to blame. It seemed, at long last, she had finally tired of blaming herself over Bob's death and was now pointing her unwarranted accusations outward. Hopper had walked straight into the line of fire.

"This is your fault!" She screamed at him when he had only been in the house a few minutes and their encounter had already reached the most bitter the two of them had ever had between themselves, in recent years at least. "You could have saved him but you didn't! You didn't even try!"

"What the hell are you talking about?!" Hopper demanded, his voice matching hers in both volume and venom.

He knew she couldn't help it, that it was the grief and the guilt talking and she didn't really mean any of it but by god he was no saint and he was known for having a temper. She seemed insistent on pushing all of his buttons just to get a damn reaction. Well if that's what she wanted he was sure as hell going to give it to her.

"I was a little busy saving you, remember?! And saving Will and Mike and all the goddamn rest of us! He was already gone Joyce, he'd been ripped to shreds in front of our very eyes and there was nothing I could do."

That was a low blow – to make her recall exactly how Bob had died, how gruesome and painful his demise had been. She flinched as soon as he said the words and turned her back on him. Her whole body tucked in on itself where she stood making her appear even smaller than normal, like a child retreating to the foetal position, desperately trying to protect herself from the harsh truth of his words.

"Joyce..." Hopper started as he approached her. His voice entirely different to what it had been before; the anger drained from him as he witnessed the completely harrowing scene in front of him. He reached out a hand and placed it on her hunched shoulder. Her already stiff body tighten even more under his touch as she shoved his comforting hand away and turned to face him. The anger was clearly not gone for her, in fact she was shaking with the force of it.

"You could have tried." She spat at him, nothing but hate in her eyes. "You're a bastard, an utter bastard, a stupid, selfish bastard and I wish it was..."

"What?!" Hopper yelled, his face too close to hers in a deliberate attempt at intimation. In one sentence she had managed to draw him

right back into her hateful, insufferable game. He was as angry as he had been only moments before, perhaps even more so. "You wish it had been me? You wish it had been you? What?!"

She didn't answer but she did not back down either. He towered over her, using all of the natural height difference to his advantage but she refused to be intimidated and he knew that had nothing to do with the rage coursing through her. She was Joyce Byers, she didn't back away from anything, ever. She may have been half his size but there was still every chance she would win this fight.

"You wish I had saved Bob and left you to die, left your boys motherless? You wish I'd gone down to the basement instead and failed at opening the doors? That I'd let us all die in there and left Jane without a single fucking person in this world that cares about her? Is that what you wish?"

Joyce stuck out her chin defiantly and stared him down.

"Maybe." She replied in an even tone.

Hopper stepped backwards in shock. His mouth literally gaping at the revelation. He knew she was hurting, *Christ* he knew she was hurting but he never thought she would actually feel, let alone admit to something as dark as that. He tried to form some words in his head, some fitting reply to convey his disgust, his horror, his utter agony at her confession but nothing came.

"You're a fucking, crazy bitch." He said at last. No anger, no spite just complete defeat.

He heard the slap before he felt it. It was sharp and surprisingly powerful, causing his whole head to snap to the side and then the sting came. It was the first time that night her actions had not surprised him in any way. If she knew how to push his buttons then he certainly knew how to return the favour. Calling her that, *crazy*, when so many people had been calling her that for so long – she was *crazy* for staying with Lonnie, she was *crazy* for finally kicking him out and trying to raise two boys on her own with no money, she was *crazy* for thinking her son was still out there when his body had been pulled from the lake, she was *crazy* for never letting her youngest boy

out of her sight. Calling her that was guaranteed to get a reaction and he wasn't entirely convinced that he didn't deserve it despite everything she had thrown at him already.

She didn't stop there. As soon as he had recovered from her initial blow she continued bestowing blow upon blow on him, hitting his face, chest, arms, anything she could reach with increasingly erratic and sloppy movements. Unlike the first slap the rest of the attack had no power behind it, it wasn't hurting him, not physically at least, it was pure desperation, pure hopelessness, pure grief.

"Stop." Hopper commanded, trying to keep his voice calm when his entire insides were anything but. "Joyce, stop." He tried again, more forcibly but still she ignored him. Still she pounded away at him pathetically, her nails catching the side of his cheek and drawing blood. He thought perhaps she expected him to fight back, to hit her as he knew Lonnie had been prone to do when their fights had become particularly vicious. Is that what she wanted? For him to get so angry with her that he hit her? That thought made him angrier than anything else that happened that night. "Goddamn it Joyce, I said stop!" He roared, his voice reaching a new level that even Joyce paused with the shock of it. Her nearest neighbours were almost a quarter mile away but he wouldn't be surprised if they had heard him. The police were probably on their way right at that moment.

He took advantage of her momentary stillness and grabbed her wrists, both of which were raised mid-air, ready to strike again. He held them tight enough so she couldn't escape, he'd probably leave marks, and although he certainly wasn't walking away from this encounter unscathed the thought of hurting her still made him sick to his stomach. Hopper backed her up until he had her pinned to the wall of her kitchen, towering above her once more so she was unable to attack him again. She stared up at him the anger still visibly bubbling away under the surface of her skin and her chest rising and falling rapidly as she sucked in hot, ragged breaths.

And suddenly they were kissing. He wasn't sure who had initiated it or if they had both had the exact same instinct in the exact same moment and met in the middle but both were certainly active participants. They kissed and bit and clawed at each other with nothing short of aggression. The anger still palpable in the air around

them but now being expressed in a different way. He hadn't kissed her in over twenty years and this was perhaps the least romantic embrace he had ever encountered in his life but still he yearned for her in a way that utterly terrified him. Like he could do nothing but this for the rest of his life and die a happy man.

It was only when he drew back for breath and looked down at her shaking body, her messy hair that looked as if she had tried to pull it out strand by strand, the anger in her eyes that was quickly liquefying into hot tears that she was desperately trying to hold back, that he realised how utterly wrong this was. He wanted her. God did he want her but not like this. Not now. He took a step backwards, separating from her entirely.

"Joyce..."

"Go." She interrupted whatever he was going to say. The thing he hadn't figured out yet but was going to make everything better and would now remain forever unsaid. Finally she wasn't angry anymore she was just sad, desperately, desperately sad.

"Joyce..." He tried again and took a step towards her but she held up her hand and he stilled instantly.

"Really Hop just go, please." She all but begged.

When he didn't move she did, she turned her back on him and walked into her bedroom, closing the door behind her without a backward glance and leaving him standing alone in her abandoned kitchen, surrounded by nothing but the complete shit they had both made out of everything.

2. Chapter 2: Grief

Disclaimer: Nothing belongs to me except the mistakes as this is un-beta'd.

Author's note: Okay so this is just as angsty but perhaps a tiny bit more fluffy?

Time After Time

It was becoming increasingly ridiculous that whatever the situation, whatever the emotion, it always seemed to lead them here – to him pressing her against the nearest flat surface and kissing her like his life depended on it, (he was beginning to think that it did), and then pretending it never happened and starting all over again. Post 2x09 Joyce/Hopper angsty fluff.

Chapter Two: Grief

For the second time in as many months Joyce wasn't entirely sure how she had ended up here – alone with Hopper in her house late at night with a heavy atmosphere hanging around them. At least no one was screaming stupid, hurtful, unforgivable things this time. Her cheeks still burned red every time she thought of the horrendous things she had said to him and what had followed afterwards.

The next couple of times she had seen after that encounter had been awkward to say the least. When he'd been dropping Jane off at hers for a movie night with the party or when they'd ran into each other in town it had been entirely uncomfortable. They'd both danced around the gigantic elephant in the room, desperately hoping the other wouldn't bring it up and talked about anything and everything to avoid the subject altogether. Just like it had never happened. It felt so distant and obscure that Joyce was beginning to wonder whether it had happened at all or if it was just some weird, little fantasy she had dreamed up herself. But if she closed her eyes she could still feel his warm, insistent lips against hers and she knew she wasn't imagining that.

When he'd come into the store earlier and brought nothing but a six-

pack of beers to the counter she'd felt instantly concerned. This had obviously registered on her face as he very quickly informed her Jane was with her Aunt Becky for the weekend. Joyce hadn't pressed him any further, still not feeling entirely comfortable with him after what had happened. But he'd volunteered the information anyway. He, himself seemed surprised he had revealed such a thing to her, as if the words had escaped him before he had the chance to hold them back:

'It's Sara's birthday today.'

Her eyes had softened in understanding at once and although it was on the tip of her tongue she did not reply with worn out, standard I'm sorry. Instead she'd smiled, a warm, genuine smile and asked how old Sara would be before inviting him over to hers for better beers and some company. To her surprise he had accepted and it was only after he had left the store that she realised it was probably a bad idea to invite the man she had been secretly obsessing over for the last god knows how many weeks over to her house to get drunk with on what would arguably be the worst night of the year for him. Still, she'd offered and she could hardly ring him and call it off.

"Thank you for this... for tonight." Hopper commented quietly as he sat next Joyce on her sofa. They were both a few beers in. Will had gone to bed and Jonathan was out with Nancy so they were alone and increasingly drowsy with alcohol and sleepiness.

"Least I could do." Joyce replied honestly. "Especially after last month when I went bat-shit crazy on you."

It was the first time either of them had mentioned that night. The silence hung heavy between the small space between them. Hopper opened his mouth to reply but thought better of it. He wanted to tell her not to worry about it, that he understood, that he was over it (the argument part of it at least), but somehow he knew his half-hazy brain wouldn't be able to word it right and would probably make it ten times worse so he remained silent beside her.

"I mean you're always there for me and the boys, always picking up the pieces of our latest disaster... it's the least I can do to return the favour a little bit."

Hopper turned to face her; there was an expression in his eyes that she could not place, an indescribable emotion somewhere between fondness, gratitude and complete sorrow. Joyce's heart broke a little at the sight. This wonderful, wonderful man that had helped her so much. Will was alive because of him and only him and she knew that. He had saved her boy, continued to save and keep him safe and she could never return that favour to him. She could never bring back his little girl or mend the gaping hole her absence had left in his life.

"I forget sometimes... I forget that El, *Jane*, isn't her, that she isn't Sara." Hopper told her quietly. He wasn't looking at her anymore but he could feel her undivided attention on him. He had the inexplicable need to bare his soul tonight but he couldn't look at her whilst doing it. So his gaze bore holes in the beer bottle he was holding instead. "And then Jane will say something or do something that's so out of character for her and I remember..." He sniffed back his feelings and began to play with the label of the bottle. "I suddenly remember that she's not her. It hits me straight out of the blue, winds me. It's like losing Sara all over again... And I hate her. In that second I hate Jane because she's not Sara. She's not Sara." He wiped at his eyes self-consciously and let out a long and pained sigh before finally turning to face Joyce once more. "Does that make me a terrible person?"

"No." Joyce answered immediately, so immediately and so assuredly he couldn't help but smile in response. He saw some of his pain reflected back in her eyes but there was also a determination there that he had come to recognise and god help anyone that got in the way when Joyce Byers had that look in her eye.

"It doesn't make you a terrible person Hop, it makes you human." She told him firmly.

"I just feel like I don't know what I'm doing most of the time."

To his surprise she laughed at his statement and somehow despite it all that sound still made him feel just a little bit better. If he had been in a different frame of mind, if it had been a different day perhaps he would have lingered on the thought that he could get used to hearing that sound for the rest of his days. That the idea of hearing that sound forevermore create a warm feeling right in the pit of his stomach that spread its way to every corner of his body and made his

very veins feel alive with the buzz of it.

"That's just parenthood!" Joyce exclaimed suddenly. "Surely you remember that? The whole goddamn thing is just a hell of a lot of guesswork and even more worrying that you're doing it wrong."

Hopper gave the small stirrings of a laugh in reply. Apparently she knew just what to say to make him feel better.

"You're doing a good job Hop. You are. Jane is safe, secure, happy... well as happy as any thirteen year old girl can be with all of the *angst*." Joyce said dramatically and he felt himself smile again. "You're doing a good job."

And just as suddenly as he had smiled he began to cry. He didn't even have the wherewithal to feel embarrassed or ashamed at showing such feeling to the woman he knew he spent an unhealthy amount of time thinking about. The verbal confirmation that he was doing okay, somehow, with everything that had happened and all that had come after him, somehow he was doing okay – Joyce's validation of this had made all of his pent up emotion come crashing down around him until he couldn't breathe from the force of it. He was entirely overcome.

He was aware of Joyce saying something, soothing words he guessed, but he couldn't hear or see her as he buried his head in his hands and rocked forwards. He felt her peel his hands away from his face with surprising strength before she literally climbed into his lap, gathered him into her crook of her neck and flung her arms tight around his shoulders. And fuck him if it wasn't the most comforted he had ever felt, in the last few years anyway and very probably more than ever before.

Her hands were in his hair and then running comforting circles across his shoulders and back as she continued to rock him and at last he could hear her gentle murmurings:

"It's okay... It's okay Hop, it's okay..." Her breathe felt warm as it danced across his forehead until at last she stopped speaking and rested her lips against his head instead.

After a few moments their rocking ceased, his tears began to dry on his cheeks and a natural and calm stillness settled around them. Neither said a word. Hopper was just about to pull out of her embrace when he felt her lips move from his head to place another impossibly soft kiss on his cheek. He closed his eyes and relished the feeling. They were approaching dangerous waters once more but he could not have told her to stop even if he'd have wanted to. She landed another kiss lower still, lingering on the scratchy stubble of his beard, and another, getting closer and closer to his mouth. When she reached her intended target she stopped, her lips hovering over his until he opened his eyes to look back at her.

She was trying to give him every opportunity to tell her to stop, to push her off of him and call her crazy again. It would be entirely deserved. God alone knew why she was doing what she was doing. All she knew was it was the best way she could think of to comfort him, to comfort them both and she desperately wanted to do that – to comfort him and make it just a little bit easier, just a little bit better. To make it all go away just for a few seconds as he had done for her countless times over the last few months.

But he didn't tell her to stop, he didn't shrug her off. Instead he leaned forward to close the tiny gap between, grabbed the sides of her head in an utterly passionate and possessive move and kissed her as if it was the end of the world as they knew it. It very well likely was. There was nothing sweet or soft about his caresses as hers had been earlier – he kissed her with a desperation, a hunger, not just for her but for the pain he was feeling to subside. He was using her as the ultimate painkiller and depressant and she couldn't have cared less. If this would take away that sadness from him he could use her as much he wanted.

She was on her back, being pressed into the sofa with all of his weight before she knew what was happening. There was something oddly comforting about having him and all of his considerable size on top of her – as if he was shielding her from the rest of the world – the only thing she could feel, see, smell and taste was him and it was glorious.

"Hop..." She moaned between searing kisses. She sounded utterly wanton.

It was then they heard the key in the lock. They froze in shock, their minds too slow from the combination of drink and lust to realise what was happening until it was too late. Jonathan strolled into the living room, he stopped dead in his tracks as his mind processed the scene in front of him and his face burned crimson.

"Oh god, sorry! I... I'm going to bed, night!" He tripped and spat over the words as he tried to get them out as fast as possible.

"Jonathan, it's not..." Joyce began as she extracted herself from under Hop. She didn't know how to continue. She couldn't very well say it's not what it looks like when it was so painfully clear that it was exactly what it looked like. She started to walk towards her eldest son but he was already at his bedroom door. He shut the door behind him and didn't look back. "Shit!" Joyce exclaimed.

Hopper had already stood up and was straightening his clothes as she turned to look at him. His eyes were still bloodshot and his cheeks were glowing red with the embarrassment of being caught or of being so opening vulnerable or because he was regretting what had just happened for all she knew.

"Hop..." The word sounded so different to what it had done only moments before. It was so uncertain now.

"I should go. It's not... it's not you, really, I just... this is really unfair of me, I shouldn't have come when I'm like this." He sounded distant and distracted and she knew whatever had just occurred between them had now passed.

"It's okay Hopper, really..." She stepped towards him but he took a step back, keeping the distance between them.

"I'm going to go. I'll see you soon okay."

He grabbed his coat from the side and left without another word. And there they were – right back to square fucking one.

3. Chapter 3: Jealousy

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Time After Time

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Chapter Three: Jealousy

In hindsight it was a dick move, a *really* dick move. Not even two weeks ago he'd been on her sofa drinking and crying and kissing her so damn hard the thought of it still left him breathless. And now he'd turned up to the Wheeler's twentieth wedding anniversary party, unexpected by all and with a date in toe.

He had met Colette whilst on duty, she worked at a gas station just outside of town that had been done over, it was unprofessional to date the witness of an open case and it was also, it had quickly transpired, been a terrible, terrible decision. Colette was everything that Joyce was not and that had been a very conscious choice – she was tall, busty, with long blonde hair and big blue eyes. She looked a lot like a Barbie doll in fact and Hop had since discovered that she had about the same amount of personality as one too.

The thing was he had spent the last two weeks, when he was not actively avoiding the Byers house or any of its residents, thinking a lot about whatever the hell it was that was growing between Joyce and himself and he had come to a very clear, definite conclusion: he and Joyce should never happen. They were both the same; both stubborn, hot-headed, *damaged* and each came with so much baggage they could both fill the arrivals lounge at JFK airport singlehandedly. She needed someone different; someone that was simple, that could love her in an uncomplicated way because they were uncomplicated,

someone like Bob. She didn't need him or the plethora of issues he came with. So there he was with Colette, trying desperately to convince himself he was moving on and yet one look in Joyce's direction, one look at her styled hair, subtle make-up and new dress and his argument was already sounding a lot less convincing to his own ears.

She had clocked him as soon as he had walked in, he had seen her eyes widen slightly as she took in the woman hanging off of his arm, before she had turned her back on him and continued her conversation with a few of the other mums in town. He couldn't blame, after all, he'd already established it was a dick move. He knew she didn't feel comfortable with the women she was talking too. She had told him once that it was obvious none of them liked her, that she was the broke woman busting her arse with two jobs because her husband had walked out and was raising two slightly strange boys. She didn't fit in with them and that had been before Will had gone missing.

He wanted to go over to her, grab her, get the heck out of this stuffy party, tack her back to her place and finish what they had started two weeks ago. But he didn't. Instead he congratulated Ted and Karen, introduced them to Colette, got the two of them a drink and settled in for an evening of misery.

He didn't have to wait long for the misery to start. About ten minutes after he had arrived Joyce began her retaliation. That retaliation was to find the most unsuitable single man she possibly could and flirt outrageously with him. It was such a clear tactic meant solely to wind him up and he had not doubt it was entirely obviously to at least half the guests at the party and not just him what her motivations were, but still it worked. The jealousy and anger bubbled in the pit of his stomach and made the drink shake in his hand. Every time she exaggerated a laugh in response to an entirely unfunny joke or leant forward too close to say something to him, or let her hand linger too long on his arm, Hopper's blood boiled. It didn't help that she accompanied all of these moves with a sly look over her shoulder in Hopper's general direction. He wanted to kill something.

About half an hour into her little show Joyce excused herself from the douche she was still talking to and made her way upstairs to use

the bathroom. But not before throwing Hopper another coy look over her shoulder as she left. It was too much an invitation to ignore. He left Colette talking to a very interested Ted and followed Joyce from the room.

He waited outside the Wheeler's upstairs bathroom as he heard the toilet flush and the sound of the sink being used. As soon as he heard the click of the lock he pushed his way into room, shutting and locking the door firmly behind him. The room was small and his large frame loomed tall, his shadow reaching into every corner of the space.

Joyce had the audacity to look surprised.

"Hop, what are you..?"

"Don't." He warned. His voice sounded dangerous. Watching her with that guy had wound him up so much more than he knew it should have, more than even she had probably planned. He knew he had to be careful; he was on the edge, about to plummet into uncontrollable anger, lust, despair, or probably all three. "Just don't. No more games."

"I'm not the one that brought some bimbo with me tonight." So she had known exactly what she was doing, of course she had. Hopper let out a pained sigh.

"I was trying... I was trying to..." To what? Get over her? Was there anything to get over? If there was he certainly hadn't succeeded in his plan. "...to move on. To forget about you and whatever this is." He finished quietly at last. He had said no more games, it was time to start being honest.

"Did it work?"

Hopper looked up at her, she was standing as far away from him as the small room would allow, her arms hugged round herself, her teeth worrying her lower lip. For the first time that night she looked vulnerable and scared. Joyce Byers the woman that could take on monsters without ever losing her nerve looked scared at the prospect of him moving on. The tension inside of him broke suddenly and the

release flooded his system.

"What do you think?" He'd followed her to bathroom. He hadn't given a second thought to Colette or what she was doing. He doubted he ever would again.

The smile his answer produced somehow made the whole goddamn thing worth it.

And then they were kissing. It was just as it had been before, all passion and heat and a bone-deep, toe-curling need that refused to be quenched no matter how much they both tried. Her delicate hands were everywhere all at once; all over his shirt, tangling in his hair, rubbing against his growing desire as it strained against his jeans. He hoisted her up effortlessly onto the sink behind her so they were at more even height before he continued his open mouth assault down her throat and deep into the valley between her breasts.

"Mine." He heard himself growl with a possessiveness he had never felt before. Whatever this was between them he had it bad, he had it so bad and he doubted he was ever going to get out of it.

She threw her head back as his hand found its way under the hem of her dress, his long fingers stroking up her thigh getting closer and closer still to her centre. When he brushed over her through her kickers she flung her hand out to steady herself and caught the tap, sending cold water gushing over the bunched up skirt of her dress. She shrieked with the surprise of it and Hopper stilled immediately before reaching behind her and turning it off. Joyce burst out laughing as soon as he had and god it was so infectious that he found himself laughing too before he could stop himself.

The ridiculousness of the moment had diffused some of the tension but none of the desire that still hung palpable in the air as Hopper leaned forward and nipped affectionately at her swollen lips. His onslaught had caused her lipstick to smudge and he brought a hand up to her face to wipe at the corner of her mouth with his thumb. Her tongue ran over his thumb seductively causing his eyes to darken with lust once more.

"Are we really going to do this here?" He asked. His voice was

cracked and croaky from their recent activities. He didn't know what was more unbelievable; that this appeared to be finally happening between the two of them or that it was happening in the Wheeler's bathroom with a house full of guests downstairs.

"I'm not sure Karen's sink could take it." She teased, biting her bottom lip once again and smiling at him in way that made him believe he could never truly deny her anything, ever again. He leaned into her, both hands resting either side of her legs on the sink and pressing his weight down as if to prove some unspoken point.

"There's nice bit of flat wall there I could lean you against." He teased right back. He laughed when she looked disgusted at his offer.

"Charming."

"Or we could get out of here, go..."

The loud, abrupt knocking caused them both to nearly jump out of their skins in fright. Joyce's hand shot to his shoulder to steady herself. She brought her other hand to her mouth and pressed her finger firmly to her lips as if she thought he was about to shout out exactly what they had just been doing. He rolled his eyes in response and steadied her on sink, his hands lingering on her hips.

"Joyce... you okay in there?" Karen called out as the door handle rattled insistently. "Look Ricky's a creep, you really shouldn't encourage him like that but he's gone now." Hopper gave her a knowing look at the entirely accurate description of the man she had been flirting with earlier. Neither said anything. Joyce didn't trust her voice not to betray her just yet and more importantly she didn't quite trust Hopper not to do something that made it extremely clear she was not alone in there. "Joyce?.. Nancy, Jonathan and Will have just got back from the movies, the boys are asking where you are... will you just come out already please."

The two of them shared a silent look that they both understood at once – the moment, for now at least, had passed.

"I'll be down in one second Karen. I'll meet you downstairs." Joyce said, her voice sounding unsteady but not as sexed as she had feared

it might.

They waited until they heard Karen huff in clear irritation and walk downstairs. Hopper helped her get down from the sink as they straightened their hair and clothes in silence. He reached out and wiped away the rest of her smudged lipstick with his thumb. The move was so gentle she almost wanted to cry – they really couldn't catch a break.

"I'll go first. Wait in here for a few minutes before you follow me." She told him quietly, almost reverently, as she checked her reflection in the mirror.

"Yeah will do. I'll need a few minutes before I'm decent enough for public display anyway." He said as he gestured vaguely to his still very obvious excitement. She shot him a sympathetic look before turning to leave.

He caught her arm just as she reached the lock and spun her round gently. He leaned down, his hand cupping the back of her head and kissed her deeply. There was no real fire or intent in the kiss, it was strong but sweet, gentle. It was a promise.

"No more games, yeah?" He whispered against her lips.

"No more games." She agreed. And then she unlocked the door, walked downstairs and re-joined the party.

4. Chapter 4: Fear

Disclaimer: Nothing belongs to me except the mistakes as this is un-beta'd.

Author's note: This has become complete fluff and I'm not even sorry. Happy reading!

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Chapter Four: Fear

"I'm his wife."

It was scary how easily those words had slipped out of her mouth, how unthreatening the lie had felt and heard to her own ears. It was necessary to tell it; she knew the medics wouldn't let her in to see him unless she was a close relative and she had to see him, she wasn't leaving the hospital until she had undeniable proof that he was okay.

She'd heard about it on the local news that was playing on the radio at work – a shootout between police and numerous suspects in this part of Indiana was almost unheard of, so of course all of the local media had been in a gleefully crazed panic about it all morning. But it wasn't in Hawkins, it was in some equally sleepy place a couple of towns over so she hadn't thought much of it, after all she'd seen things that were a lot more unusual and strange than that in the last couple of years. But then, after hours of repeating the same few pieces of information over and over again, the news reporter had offered up something new – the rumour of a police fatality, an officer believed to be a member of the Hawkins police department.

Her blood had run cold at the announcement. It couldn't be. It just

couldn't be, after they had been through, everything they had survived and the semi-stable piece of ground they had finally found themselves on, fate couldn't be such an unfeeling bitch as to take him from her now... could it?

Joyce had rung the station but of course it had been engaged, repeatedly. No doubt everyone else in town was wondering the same thing and trying to get through to obtain some answers. But her need was *greater*. She had come to rely on him so much over the last year or so. His saving of her family had not ended when he'd lead her into the Upside Down to bring Will home, that had only been the beginning. He had been there every step of the way since, every hospital appointment and every irrational phone call. Always the first to believe her, always the first to offer help, always the one with the answers that seemed to make it all better.

The thought that she had lost that, lost him, utterly broke her. And so she had come to the hospital and had blagged her way this far. They hadn't told her he was dead but they hadn't told he was fine either. She still had no idea what was happening as they lead her to a private patient's room and told her to wait outside.

The nurse she had followed went in and closed the door behind her. She heard her the murmurings of the nurse's voice and then a moment later the much deeper murmurings of the reply. She almost cried out in relief. She couldn't hear what he was saying but there was no denying that was Hopper. He was alive, he was up and talking and he was alive. The nurse came back out and held the door open for Joyce to pass through.

He was sitting on the side of his bed as she entered the room. Another nurse was dressing a wound on his shoulder – he had been shot but just a flesh a wound from what she could see and he clearly wasn't in that much pain if the way he was smirking at her was anything to go by.

"Mrs Hopper." He greeted her playfully and she ran at him full speed as she dived at his chest, aiming for his good side and luckily hitting her target. The nurse jumped back in surprise but smiled at the two of them.

"I'll give you guys a minute." She told them as she left the room.

Hopper wrapped both of his arms around her as she continued to shake against his bare chest. The movement caused considerable discomfort to his wounded shoulder but he gritted his teeth and brought his good arm up to stroke the back of her hair.

"Honestly, I show you a good time *once* in Karen Wheeler's bathroom and you go off and get us married without even telling me." He teased her slightly. She began to laugh in reply but somehow it turned into a sob as she cried properly and earnestly against him. She was so relieved she could barely breathe. He tightened his grip around her and as always his embrace was entirely too comforting, as if his arms alone could protect her from the rest of the world and all the shit that came with it, it made her cry even more.

"I was so scared..." She managed to sob against him. "They said there had been a police fatality from the Hawkins' department and I was so scared it could be you." She felt him go rigid against her.

"Jesus Joyce I'm sorry. Those stupid fuckwits! There was no police fatality at all, just a couple of superficial injuries to share out amongst all of us. I'd have called you if I'd known..."

"I know." She interrupted him as she at last managed to get a hold of her breathing and slow her tears. She pulled out from his embrace to stand face to face with him. With him sitting on the bed and her standing between his legs they were actually at the same height for once. He reached forward to wipe her tears with his rough fingers and smooth her hair a little. He gave her a quiet, reverent kind of attention that was utterly intoxicating. "Kiss me." She suddenly blurted out.

"Joyce..." He breathed out softly against her face. He sounded uncertain.

"I know." She said again. And she did know. She knew what he was going to say – that she was upset and emotional and it had been less than week since they had made their deal of 'no more games' in the Wheeler's bathroom and they had barely had time to say hello to each other since then let alone sit down and work out exactly how to

move forward. She knew all of that but right then she couldn't have cared in the least. "I know. But kiss me anyway, *please*."

He could never refuse her anything when she asked him like that. The kiss was different that it had been between them before, in recent years at least. It was unrushed, gentle, loving. Somehow she needed to feel him between her own lips to truly know he was still alive. When he parted his mouth slightly she sought out his tongue in an attempt to get even closer to him still. She would have crawled beneath his very skin if she could have and settled, at peace, within him. He pulled back from her slightly and then immediately kissed her again with just as much deference. He then kissed her once, twice on the side of her face. Solid, physical, life-affirming kisses. She would tire of the way he kissed her – like she was the only good thing in the world. It made her feel beyond powerful.

"I think I love you." She confessed in a breathy whisper as he continued to stroke her face. If her actions had showed anything in the last hour or so it was that. He didn't still his movements as he replied, but his mouth slowly spread to give her a genuine smile.

"Well good, because I know I love you." He told her matter-of-factly.

"No, I mean..." Her eyebrows had knotted together in the most adorable way and it caused his smile to stretch even further. She meant she didn't loved him because they were friends, because they had a shared history and had been through so much together. She meant that she was *in* love with him and all that could possibly involve. Good, bad and no doubt ugly. He knew that, he knew that and he felt exactly the same way, and if getting shot at by a bunch of barmy bastards was what made the two of them finally realise that then so be it.

"I know what you mean and I do too." His fingers worked their way under her chin until he tilted her head back up and forced her to look him in the eye. "Joyce, I do too." He promised.

"Okay." She finally agreed. "So what are we going to do about it?"

"Not a fucking clue." He responded and to his surprise she burst out laughing. Well laughing beat crying he supposed.

It was messy and beyond complicated and completely the wrong time with everything that had happened to Will and Jane and the Upside Down and Bob and Sara and all of the past tragedies that made up their lives. But despite all of that it had happened anyway. He truly had no idea what they were going to do next, how they were going to handle all of the shit this would inevitably bring their way but he didn't have to figure that out now. So Hopper just pulled her close once more, wrapped his arms around her and held the woman that he loved.

5. Chapter 5: Joy

Disclaimer: Nothing belongs to me except the mistakes as this is un-beta'd.

Author's note: Here's the last chapter. Thanks for all the love

Happy reading.

Time After Time

It was becoming increasingly ridiculous that whatever the situation, whatever the emotion, it always seemed to lead them here – to him pressing her against the nearest flat surface and kissing her like his life depended on it, (he was beginning to think that it did), and then pretending it never happened and starting all over again. Post 2x09 Joyce/Hopper angsty fluff.

Chapter Five: Joy

It felt absurdly domestic – staying in on a Friday night, Will and Jane asleep down the hall, Jonathan out at the movies with Nancy, the radio playing softly from the counter as Joyce stood at her sink washing up the remnants from their pizza and movie night, and Hopper standing beside her drying the plates as she passed them to him. It felt as if they had been doing this for years and that both terrified and thrilled her all at once.

It has been less than a week since she had lied her way into the hospital after Hopper had been shot. They had finally confessed how they felt but had done nothing about it since and certainly hadn't told anybody else. Having two full-time jobs and three children between them did tend to get in the way a bit.

But then Joyce had suggested the movie night for Jane who was getting agitated being cooped up alone in the cabin again. That had somehow been turned into a sleepover so Mike and no doubt the others could come over tomorrow and play their games that Hopper didn't understand. He had been firm in telling them they couldn't go outside but no one had seemed to care about that, apparently they'd

rather spent their day huddled around a board in semi-darkness anyway. He really didn't get it.

He had to admit the thought of leaving Joyce's nice, warm house to return alone to his cold and empty cabin was less than appealing. Especially with all of the long and meaningful looks Joyce kept throwing his way throughout the film and afterwards. But he wasn't going to suggest he stayed. He had to take this slow – there was too much at stake and he really, *really* didn't want to fuck it up.

Hopper began to hum along with the song playing on the radio and saw Joyce glance at him from the corner of her eye. The sides of her lips curled up into a smile as she watched him. That was all the encouragement he needed. He sang along a little, relishing in the light giggle it produced from her.

"Enjoying yourself?" She teased him as she passed him the last plate and began to drain the water.

He was. He had done nothing that evening but simply be with her and their kids and he had enjoyed himself more than he had in a long time. He just hoped it was sign of things to come. He placed the plate on the draining board, threw the tea towel over his shoulder and began to dance to the music. He was acting like a fool he was sure and his dancing left a lot to be desired but he didn't care. She was looking at him with such a playfulness bursting in her eyes and when she threw back her head and let out a laugh at his expense it sounded so utterly joyous. He could have listened to that sound for the rest of his life.

"Care to join me?" He offered her his hand.

"I really don't." She replied, clearly teasing.

He lunged forward and grabbed her anyway, enjoying the slight squeal of surprise she made at the move. He had his arm around her waist, his chest pressed into her back, and he lifted her off of the ground and spun her round and round just to hear that laugh again. It worked. They span and danced and span again until suddenly they were kissing. They were breathless to start with and the kisses were hard, rushed, frantic. They were acting like nothing short of horny

teenagers. It was just as it was in the Wheeler's bathroom a couple of weeks ago; where her hands had felt like they were everywhere at once as they did now and his head was spinning and he couldn't think straight, couldn't even tell his lungs to breath until he was gasping against her open mouth. There was no finesse or grace to their movements, if anything he was sloppy with the need of it all, but she kept giggling between the kisses and the gulping breaths. She sounded so damn happy he figured he must be doing something right.

He led her backwards until her back hit the kitchen counter and then scooped her up onto it to make them the same height. His aching back thanked him for the decision. Joyce spread her legs wide so he could stand between them and it was embarrassingly close to all being over then, just from the invitation.

He stepped closer to her and put his head on her chest as he caught his breath and tried to calm the hell down a bit. He wanted this to last for longer than two seconds. And besides it was them – wasn't this about the time that something usually went horribly wrong and ended with one of them storming out?

"What's the matter?" Joyce asked, breathless against the top of his head as her hands came to rest on his shoulders. There was genuine concern in her voice hidden somewhere under the heavy desire that dominated it.

"Nothing..." Hopper groaned. *Get it together. Get it together for Christ sake.* He told himself over and over again in his head for several moments. "Nothing, I just... isn't this the point where one of us usually gets cold feet or we get interrupted and everything stops again?"

She kissed the top of his head in response and he felt her smile against his hairline.

"Jonathan is out for the night, the other two are sound asleep and there is not a chance in hell that I'm getting cold feet tonight. Are you?"

He finally raised his head to face her and the look in his eye, the

intense longing and need, told her his answer. She kissed him again, just as strong and passionate but much less rushed. His hands wrapped around the underside of her thighs as he brought her to the worktop's edge to be closer to him still. Her denim glad crotch rubbed against his in an exaggerated, calculated move on her part. Hopper bucked his hips involuntarily as he felt her smile against his lips. There was no denying who was leading this. She hooked her ankles around the back of his thighs to keep herself pressed against his ever tightening groin. She rubbed herself on him selfishly taking exactly what she wanted from him and threw her head back in pleasure. He placed lazy kisses to the side of her neck as she arched her body to give him better access, all the while still moving against him.

"Hop, take me to bed." She whispered frantically above him. He paused and groaned openly against the side of her neck.

She was actually trying to kill him.

"We go in there I don't think I'm going to be able to stop myself." He explained, taking big puffs of air. She stopped moving against him at once. He missed the delicious, head-spinning friction immediately. She placed both of hands on the side of his head and forced him to look at her, displaying a surprising amount of strength.

"Do you still think I'm not sure about this? That I'm going to suddenly change my mind?" He got the instinctual feeling those were rhetorical questions so he stayed quiet. "I get it. I get that this thing between us is going to be messy and complicated and about as fucked up as we both are. And the timing is probably horrible and you probably think this is some weird grief thing over Bob or some kind of thank you/apology for saving my child when you couldn't save your own..." Hopper swallowed uncomfortably. It was unnerving how well she had his current feelings sussed when they hadn't discussed any of that. "Well you're wrong." In any other situation he may have laughed at how matter-of-factly she said that. "It's not any of those things. It's just you and me. And I love you. And I feel like I might actually die if you don't just shut up and ki..."

Hopper crashed his lips upon hers before she could finish speaking. All the heat and fire from moments ago was there again as if they

had never stopped. She made a compelling argument and he trusted her – if she said she wanted this then she wanted this. Besides which, he whole-heartedly agreed, he may very well die if he didn't get to be with her soon.

And so they went back to kissing and laughing and spinning as he picked her up and twirled her around as if they were in some god-awful romantic comedy film. And if every emotion had seemed to lead them to the same thing – to an uncontrollable passion, an unbreakable bond between them, he was glad they were finally surrendering to each other on this one – pure, unadulterated joy.